

Tall, Tan and Tasty

Squashes are more than 10,000 years old, but the butternut squash has been around for less than 100 years.

By Justin Holbrock



Roasted butternut squash made with salt, pepper, canola oil, garlic powder and granola. Photo credit: Justin Holbrock.

A long history exists between squash and human civilization. Squash seeds were found in caves located in Ecuador about 12,000 years ago, according to the National Museum of American History. Squash was considered one of the three primary crops grown in the Americas with the other two being corn and maize.

Squashes have many different attributes including color, shape and size. One specific type is the butternut squash, which has a few distinct features: a slim neck, a bulbous bottom, a yellow-tan exterior and a deep orange flesh.

The butternut squash is a type of winter squash, which are hard, thick and late growing. The term winter squash can be misleading because it's harvested in the fall, but can be kept through the winter because of its thick skin.

Shape and texture, however, aren't the only attributes of the butternut squash. It has a few key nutritional benefits, which includes the highest doses of vitamin A and vitamin C of all winter squashes, according to the University of Arkansas Department of Agriculture. Plus, winter squashes may help reduce the risk of heart disease, respiratory disease, cancer and diabetes, also according to the University's Department of Agriculture.

The U.S. is the worldwide leader in importing squash with an average of 300,000 metric tons imported into the country each year, according to the USDA Agricultural Marketing Resource Center. In fact, 95 percent of the squash imported into the U.S. comes from Mexico, according to the resource center.

The U.S production of all squashes experienced no recorded change from 2014 to 2015, according to the USDA.

Squash is grown worldwide with the U.S., China, India and Russia being the biggest producers, according to a study from the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources at the University of Hawaii.

The U.S. grew more than 6 million pounds of squash in 2015. California led all states in production that year at more than 864,000 pounds produced, according to the USDA.

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